



Clean Air Washington

The Clean Air Washington Act of 1991 sets a comprehensive new course toward cleaner air throughout the state.

Alternative Motor Vehicle Fuels

The problem

Motor vehicles are Washington's largest air pollution source, accounting for more than 50 percent of the statewide total, or about 1.3 million tons of pollutants per year. The metropolitan areas in Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, and Yakima counties officially exceed federal health standards for carbon monoxide, mainly because of motor vehicle pollution. Motor vehicle emission account for much of the reason why King, Pierce, Snohomish and southern Clark counties exceed federal ozone pollution standards, too. Compounding the problem is the fact that vehicle use is growing two to three times faster than the rate of increase of Washington's population.

Cleaner fuel and alternative power

There are several alternatives to today's gasoline and diesel fuel. These include: compressed natural gas (CNG), propane, methanol, ethanol, reformulated or oxygenated gasoline, liquefied petroleum gas, electricity, and hydrogen. There is, however, no inherently clean fuel. It is important to look at actual emissions from specific vehicles. There are vehicles available now whose emissions are below the federal standards.

Alternative fuel technologies can offer the possibility of lower emissions. To date, alternative fuels are used mainly in large, centrally fueled fleets. This is due, in part, to high costs and a lack of refueling stations and manufacturers.

School districts in Tacoma, Tumwater, Yelm, and West Valley near Spokane run buses on compressed natural gas. The cities of Enumclaw, Kirkland, and Longview use it in their municipal fleets. Compressed natural gas vehicles have been introduced into the King County motor pool. Pierce Transit plans to run its entire fleet on compressed natural gas in ten years.

Propane is used in 46 local government fleets. The North Shore School District, near Seattle, has been operating propane vehicles since 1977.

Clean Air Washington's requirements

- Required Ecology to develop specifications that define clean fuels and clean-fuel vehicles for as many types of fuel as possible by July 1, 1992.
- Requires that at least 30 percent of new vehicles purchased by the state must be "clean-fuel vehicles." This requirement increases five percent every year. Ecology and the Energy Office are looking into recommending a "fuel blind" standard that recommends cleaner vehicles,

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- standard that recommends cleaner rather than specific “clean fuel.” In this way, cars that are now available using standard gasoline, but which have low emissions, can be considered for purchase, as well as vehicles that use “alternative fuels.”
 - Establishes a school bus compressed natural gas advisory committee, administered by the Washington State Energy Office, to study the potential benefits, costs, and safety risks of increasing the use of CNG as a fuel for school buses. The committee submitted a report to the legislature in December 1991.
 - Directs Ecology, in cooperation with other departments, to report every two years to the legislature on the clean fuel program. This report should include the effect of the program on air quality, recommendations for enhancing the distribution of clean fuels, and how much the private sector and local governments have been using clean fuels and clean-fuel vehicles.
 - Requires the Utilities and Transportation commission to identify barriers to the development of CNG refueling stations and to develop policies to remove those obstacles.
 - Provides for the use of air pollution control funds for matching grants to local governments that voluntarily decide to switch to clean-fuel vehicles for public transit. These grant monies may also be used to start clean-fuel vehicle mechanic certification programs at vocational-technical institutes.
 - Provides funds to Western Washington University for research and development of alternative fuel and solar-powered vehicles.

For more information

Ecology has prepared fact sheets on each major element of Clean Air Washington. Any or all of these are available from the Washington State Department of Ecology, PO Box 47600, Olympia, WA 98504-7600, or call:

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If you have special accommodation needs or require this document in alternative format, please call Tami Dahlgren at (360) 407-6830 (voice) or (360) 407-6006 (TDD only).